

27 December 1965

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Participants: Walt W. Rostow
Sherman Kent

25X1A

Place : Mr. Rostow's office

Time : 27 December 1965 (1645-1745)

SUBJECT : SNTB 10-12-65: PROBABLY COMMUNIST REACTIONS
TO A US COURSE OF ACTION
(10 December 1965)

PACIFICQUED

1. Mr. Rostow had on a couple of occasions criticized the subject SNTB in Mr. Helms' presence. Mr. Helms asked

25X1A Meers. Kent [REDACTED] to make an appointment with Rostow and hear out his criticisms in detail. The conversation here reported was the result.

SUMMARY OF CONVERSATION

2. Mr. Rostow's general and basic complaint about the SNTB was that it did not adequately meet the need of the high-

[REDACTED]

level policy-maker who must decide which, if any, of the postulated courses of action to adopt. He thought also that the judgments set forth were not sufficiently supported by the citation of evidence and the marshalling of argument, pro and con.

3. Rostow's first point was that the estimate's Problem, as stated, lays out such a broad range of possible courses of action that the policy-maker can get little guidance from the discussion. We called Rostow's attention to the SNE's specific finding that neither Communist nor Free World reactions would depend critically on which of the specified targets were bombed (para 13). Mr. Hughes, for the State Department, had dissentied from this finding and had set forth in a footnote the differences he perceived in the likely responses to different US courses of action. Mr. Rostow did not seem much impressed with the Hughes footnote and did not press, or even fully develop, this first point.

4. Rostow's next points were, as he himself said, closely related. He stated as an underlying proposition that it would be a combination of frustration in South Vietnam and an accumulating "cost" (i.e., damage) in North Vietnam that would bring the Communists to terms. He spoke of possible differences of view within the DRV leadership on this issue, and stated that

there was some evidence that should be examined and discussed in an estimate of this sort. (He referred in particular to the Bernard Fall interview with Ho Chi Minh which ran in the Saturday Evening Post.)

5. Furthermore, in Rostow's opinion, the SNIE does not examine thoroughly enough the various elements of "cost" and the consequences of each for the DRV. He referred to the Haiphong POL facility. What, he asked, would the loss of that facility do, in specific terms, to the domestic economy of North Vietnam and to its logistical capabilities? A similar question with respect to the electric power plants: what specific effects would a general power failure have for the DRV economy and for DRV strategic capabilities for continuing the war? He referred several times to his own experience in target selection and analysis during World War II. (On this point, Mr. Kent responded that studies of the economic and military importance of various targets have been written; that such studies provide the sort of information and judgment that Mr. Rostow wants, and at a level of detail far greater than is appropriate for a SNIE; and that the consequences of destroying particular elements of a primitive economy like the DRV's were far less -- and far less easy to assess with any precision -- than the consequences of destroying extensive target systems in the sophisticated German economy.)

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6. (a) On the more general theme, we pointed out to Rostow that estimators are rightly reluctant to put forward hypothetical courses of action as a basis for estimates; that these should -- as in the case of this SHIE -- come from the policy-maker. Rostow understands this point, concedes its validity, and recognizes that these particular courses of action were not our creation.

(b) We went on to emphasize that the courses of action given us are often -- as in this case, and even more in the recent Indo-Pakistan estimate -- not well formulated; that we frequently cannot pick out the precise flaws in these formulations, until we have taken a first cut at constructing the estimate; but that the deadlines are short, often -- as in this case -- unnecessarily so; and that hence we have no chance to sit down with the requesters to thrash out a framework that would require and support an estimate of maximum use for the policy-maker. This point seemed to appeal to Rostow, and we agreed that in future cases when we felt the need of consultation with the policy side in order to redirect or refine a "Statement of the Problem," we could come to him for guidance and help.

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ACTION	DIRECT REPLY	PREPARE REPLY	
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Remarks:

This memo of conversation seems to indicate a different set of questions in Kostow's mind than we thought.

FOLD HERE TO RETURN TO SENDER

FROM: NAME, ADDRESS AND PHONE NO.

DATE

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